

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 06532 180609Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 SSM-03 EUR-12 /079 W
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5263
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USUN
USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 6532

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR, SY
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION TO US-ISRAELI WORKING PAPER

SUMMARY: SEVERAL EDITORIALS RESTRAINED IN TONE BUT HIGHLY
CRITICAL OF US-ISRAELI WORKING PAPER HAVE APPEARED IN SYRIAN
MEDIA. PRESS CALLED WORKING PAPER RETREAT FROM US-SOVIET
COMMUNIQUE IN FACE OF ZIONIST PRESSURE ON US ADMINISTRATION.
AMERICAN POLICY PRONOUNCEMENTS ARE SEEN AS CONTRADICTIONARY
AND SUSPICIONS ARE BEING VOICED AGAIN THAT GENEVA IS TRAP
FOR ARABS SINCE IT CANNOT BE SUCCESSFUL IF CONVENED ON PROPOSED
TERMS. ISRAEL AND US SAID TO BE ATTEMPTING IMPOSE THEIR
TUTELAGE ON ARABS BY SELECTING UNIFIED DELEGATION MEMBERS
AND DICTATING BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS, SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DAMASC 06532 180609Z

PLO REITERATED IN VERY STRONG TERMS. SUSPICION ALSO
EXPRESSED ABOUT PROPOSED MULTILATERAL WORKING GROUPS ON
WEST BANK/GAZA QUESTIONS WHICH WOULD EXCLUDE SYRIA AND
THE PLO. SYRIAN PRESS HAS PROMINENTLY CARRIED REMARKS
OF PNC CHAIRMAN FAHUM CRITICIZING THE WORKING PAPER AND
CALLING IT "UNACCEPTABLE." THIS SEEN AS ATTEMPT BY
SYRIA TO INSURE ITSELF OF PLO SUPPORT IF EGYPT AND JORDAN

SHOULD PROVE READY TO ACCEPT A PAPER WHICH SYRIA MIGHT FIND IT NECESSARY TO REJECT. END SUMMARY

1. SYRIAN MEDIA HAD BEEN EXPRESSING NEGATIVE VIEW OF US-ISRAELI WORKING PAPER BEFORE IT WAS HANDED OVER TO SARG FOR COMMENT. NOW THAT SARG, AS WELL AS EVERYONE ELSE, KNOWS THE FULL CONTENTS OF THE WORKING PAPER, SYRIAN MEDIA HAS SHARPENED ITS NEGATIVE ESTIMATE.

2. NEVERTHELESS, US-MIDEAST POLICY AND THE WORKING PAPER ARE BEING CRITICIZED IN RELATIVELY RESTRAINED FASHION. THE WORKING PAPER HAS FURTHER SMOKED OUT SYRIA'S POSITION ON SOVIET-US STATEMENT, SINCE US IS NOW BEING ACCUSED OF TRYING TO RENEGE ON SOME "POSITIVE POINTS" CONTAINED IN THAT STATEMENT.

3. COMMON THEMES APPEARING IN THESE EDITORIALS ARE PROFESSIONS OF BAFFLEMENT WITH "CONTRADICTORY" NATURE OF US PRONOUNCEMENTS, ASSERTIONS THAT US RETREATING IN FACE OF "ZIONIST" PRESSURE, AND ACCUSATIONS THAT US AND ISRAEL CONNIVING TO BLAME ARABS FOR INEVITABLE FAILURE OF GENEVA CONFERENCE IF IT CONVENES ON PRESENTLY PROPOSED TERMS. MOST COMMENTARIES GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO REAFFIRM SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR PLO ATTENDANCE AT GENEVA WHICH IS CALLED, NOT A PROCEDURAL QUESTION BUT, "THE CRUX OF THE PROBLEM." ONE EDITORIAL EVEN NOTES THAT ISRAEL WISHES TO DISCUSS "SECONDARY CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DAMASC 06532 180609Z

QUESTIONS" SUCH AS "COSMETIC WITHDRAWALS" FROM GOLAN AND SINAI RATHER THAN A PALESTINIAN HOMELAND. ATTEMPTS TO EXCLUDE THE PLO AND PREVENT PALESTINIAN SELF-DETERMINATION ARE "CATEGORICALLY REJECTED."

3. PROPOSALS FOR EXCLUDING SYRIA FROM COMMITTEES TO DISCUSS WEST BANK/GAZA QUESTIONS ALSO DREW SYRIAN IRE. ISRAEL AND US ALLEGED TO BE ATTEMPTING "TO IMPOSE TUTELAGE" ON THE ARABS BY DETERMINING WHO SHOULD BE ON THE ARAB DELEGATION AND DECREETING THAT EACH ARAB PARTY SHOULD MEET SEPARATELY WITH ISRAEL. THIS CHARACTERIZED AS PLAN TO REMOVE THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE FROM ITS PAN-ARAB CONTEXT AND TO SPLIT THE ARABS. ONE EDITORIAL CHARGED THAT THESE PROPOSALS ARE DESIGNED TO PREVENT SYRIA AND THE PLO FROM DISCUSSING QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE.

4. MOST COMPREHENSIVE EDITORIAL ON SUBJECT TO APPEAR WAS IN TISHRIIN ON OCTOBER 16 ENTITLED "THE WORKING PAPER AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE." US ADMINISTRATION WAS CHARACTERIZED AS BEING "VERY CAREFUL TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION WITH ISRAEL AND THE ZIONIST LOBBY." THE WORKING PAPER, IT CLAIMED, "IN ITS ABSOLUTE REJECTION OF THE PLO," TOUCHES UPON A

FUNDAMENTAL PALESTINIAN QUESTION WHICH IF NOT RESOLVED WILL PREVENT A SETTLEMENT. EDITORIAL, HOWEVER, GRUDGINGLY ACKNOWLEDGES IN ISRAELI ACCEPTANCE OF PALESTINIANS AT GENEVA A RECOGNITION OF THE "PALESTINIAN PRESENCE," ALTHOUGH THIS "RETREAT," IT IS CLAIMED, IS RENDERED MEANINGLESS BY ISRAELI CONDITIONS. ARABS WARNED NOT TO ABANDON THEIR POSITIONS IN FACE OF THIS ISRAELI POSITION BUT CALLED UPON TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE WITH INCREASED FIRMNESS AND DETERMINATION.

5. IN OCT 17 AL-BAATH COLUMN ENTITLED "THE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATION AND GENEVA" US IS SAID TO HAVE AS ITS GOAL THE "CONVOCAION OF GENEVA CONFERENCE WHICH WILL IGNORE ALL OF THE BASIC ISSUES IN WHICH THE ARABS BELIEVE. EVEN IF THE CONFERENCE DOES CONVENE IT WILL ONLY BE AN CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 DAMASC 06532 180609Z

EXHIBITION THAT AIMS AT HOLDING THE ARABS RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS FAILURE; "A FAILURE SAID TO BE INEVITABLE SINCE THE ESSENTIAL ISSUES WILL NOT BE DISCUSSED AT THE BEGINNING, BUT POSTPONED "ON THE PRETEXT OF DISCUSSING SECONDARY ISSUES (GOLAN AND SINAI "COSMETIC WITHDRAWALS")." PRES. CARTER'S STATEMENT AT HIS OCT 15 PRESS CONFERENCE THAT HE DOES NOT FAVOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE IS SEEN AS "DESTROYING ALL THE PREVIOUS AMERICAN DECLARATIONS" AND TURNING THE SITUATION BACK TO WHERE IT WAS BEFORE THE OCTOBER WAR. COLUMN CHARGED THAT THE US ADMINISTRATION WISHED TO "SUBJUGATE AND HUMILIATE THE ARABS" BY MAKING THEM GIVE AWAY "ALL THE CARDS THAT ARE IN THEIR HANDS" AND THEN THE US WILL TELL THEM "TO GET LOST" AFTER DECLARING THAT IT CANNOT PRESSURE ISRAEL INTO ANYTHING. THE COLUMN CONCLUDED THAT BY FALLING FOR SUCH A GAME THE ARABS WOULD LOSE EVERYTHING, "EVEN THEIR FRIENDS."

6. FEARING THAT JORDAN AND EGYPT MAY PROVE TOO AMENABLE TO MANY OF THE PROPOSALS CONTAINED IN THE WORKING PAPER, SYRIA SEEMS TO BE MOVING TO INSURE ITSELF THAT IT CAN COUNT ON PLO SUPPORT TO PREVENT ITS ISOLATION AMONG ARAB PARTIES INVOLVED IN THE SETTLEMENT PROCESS. PNC CHAIRMAN, KHALED FAHUM'S STRONGLY NEGATIVE REMARKS ABOUT THE WORKING PAPER WERE FEATURED TWICE IN THREE DAYS ON FRONT PAGE OF DAMASCUS DAILIES. ON OCT 15 IN INTERVIEW WITH AL-THAWRA, FAHUM DECLARED THAT PLO WOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY MEETING CONVENED ON BASIS OF 242. ALTHOUGH HE NOTED THAT THE CENTRAL COUNCIL WOULD DISCUSS THE WORKING PAPER, HE SAID THE PAPER WAS "UNACCEPTABLE," SINCE "IT DISREGARDED THE ROLE OF THE PLO WHICH INCLUDES ALL THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE WHEREVER THEY ARE." HE SAID THE WORKING PAPER DESTROYS THE RABAT SUMMIT RESOLUTIONS AND THOSE OF THE UNGA; CALLING IT "AN OVERT ATTEMPT TO REVERSE THE NATIONAL CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 DAMASC 06532 180609Z

RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE BEST REPRESENTED BY THE
PLO." PRESS AGAIN QUOTED FAHUM ON MONDAY REPEATING
ESSENTIALLY THE SAME STATEMENTS.

7. BY ALLOWING THE PLO TO GET OUT FRONT ON THE ISSUE,
THE SYRIANS ARE IN POSITION TO USE LEVERAGE OF PLO SUPPORT IF
EGYPT AND JORDAN TAKE POSITIONS WIDELY DIFFERING FROM THEIR OWN.
THE MEDIA STRESS ON FAHUM'S REMARKS LEADS US TO SUSPECT THAT
HE WAS ENCOURAGED BY SYRIA IN HIS CATEGORICAL REJECTION
OF THE US WORKING PAPER TO TAKE THE ONUS OFF SYRIA.
MURPHY

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Message Attributes

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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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